



Framing the Future

The Political Case for Strengthening the Visual Arts Ecosystem

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3	Foreword	Cat Eccles MP
5	Executive Summary	
11	The Visual Arts Ecosystem	
16	Raising Living Standards	
25	Supporting Wellbeing and Health Outcomes	
34	Improving Educational Attainment	
38	The Challenges Inhibiting Growth and Impact	
51	Recommendations for the Spending Review	
53	Introduce a UK Cultural Investment Partnership Fund	
57	Create a £5 million Grassroots Visual Arts Fund	
60	Expand Access to Creative Education in and out of School	
60	Restore Specialist Subject Funding for Creative Subjects in Higher Education	
62	Strategic Levers for Sector Growth Beyond the Spending Review	
63	Reduce Regulatory Burdens on the Art Market	
63	Explore a Smart Fund to Sustain the Creative Economy	
65	Empower Regions to Introduce a Tourist Levy	
65	Increase Eligibility for the Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief	
66	Conclusion	
67	Endnotes	
72	Organisations	

Foreword

Cat Eccles, Labour MP for Stourbridge and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Visual Arts and Artists

As this report sets out, by almost every metric, the UK's visual arts sector outperforms. We are home to the world's top-ranked universities in art, design, and art history. We host 12 of the 100 most visited museums and galleries globally. The UK continues to compete directly with China and the US for global share in the visual arts market.

This is not an accident but a testament to the talent of those working across the visual arts ecosystem, which has been underpinned by historic investments in arts education and our non-profit infrastructure.

This ecosystem has long been rooted in communities across the UK. Dame Sonia Boyce DBE, winner of the Golden Lion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, arguably the highest honour in contemporary art, studied BA Fine Art at Stourbridge College, in my constituency. But like so many regional art schools in towns and cities nationwide, it has since closed.

I've also seen, both in my constituency and through my work as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Visual Arts and Artists, the more subtle but transformative impacts the visual arts can have on the local level – how the sector is changing lives and building community across the country.

Stourbridge has a long history of artistic talent, music and creativity which continues to this day. The Red House Glass Cone celebrates the glass making industry and is home to a number of world renowned glass artists. The International Festival of Glass was based in Stourbridge until recently and will tour the country for the next few years to help promote this at risk craft.

I have worked with local artist Cal on a number of projects over the years with an ambition to make art accessible to more people. We've worked on some street art projects to brighten up local spaces and have a plan to do a Paint Festival in collaboration with well known street artists. Most recently we worked on a project with Powered By CAN to give local children and young people the opportunity to take part in a street art project in Hawbush Park. This included children from pupil referral and SEN students who learned new skills and helped plan the artwork for the park.

Giving the students ownership over the project promotes pride and respect in the local area and gives them a sense of purpose and achievement. I'm planning to help facilitate more projects like this that can transform lives and give access to the arts to everyone in our communities. We will shortly be starting a project to celebrate the musical history of Stourbridge – think Robert Plant, Ned's Atomic Dustbin, The Wonderstuff – through street art. Many local people and businesses have come forward to offer walls and gable ends to paint, as well as a local scaffolding company providing platforms free of charge. Art can really bring together entire communities.

In England, our Arts Council sits at the heart of this success story. Its investment provides the foundation on which so much of the sector relies – supporting grassroots artists, sustaining organisations, and ensuring access to culture across the country. The value for money it delivers is significant. As this report highlights, the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe allocates around €600 million annually to cultural funding in the city alone – far more than the entire annual budget for Arts Council England's National Portfolio (£458.5 million), even when combined with the Mayor of London's culture programme. The ongoing review of Arts Council England, led by Dame Margaret Hodge, offers a timely opportunity to ensure it can reach its full potential in the years ahead.

However, this report shows that there are opportunities for impact that go beyond the scope of existing funding structures. It demonstrates that the visual arts can be a powerful tool for delivering on some of the Labour Government's core missions – from driving inclusive economic growth, to supporting early years education, to delivering better health outcomes. The visual arts should be recognised as part of the essential infrastructure needed to achieve these goals – not a competing demand on public funding, but as a strategic partner in realising them.

That's why this report is important. It sets out a vision for the future of the visual arts that builds on our strengths, learns from international best practice, and unlocks the full potential of the sector to contribute to a fairer, healthier, and more prosperous country. I hope it will be read widely across the Government and beyond, and help to drive a deeper recognition of the vital role the visual arts already play, and the even greater impact they can have in the years to come.

Executive Summary

The visual arts are part of our shared humanity – shaping how we think, feel, and navigate the world. Their value extends far beyond any metrics, enriching society in ways that cannot be reduced to numbers on a spreadsheet. However, in a time of social, economic, and geopolitical upheaval, we recognise that policymakers face near-impossible decisions about where to invest. It is therefore important to highlight how the visual arts make measurable contributions to some of the UK's most pressing economic and social challenges, and how targeted investment can offer strong value for money in addressing these issues. This paper demonstrates exactly that.

The UK's visual arts sector operates as an interconnected ecosystem. From artists and educators to galleries and audiences, every component plays a role in sustaining a vibrant cultural landscape that is genuinely world-leading. For example:

- Many of the most successful living artists are British, including Anish Kapoor, Damien Hirst, David Hockney, Jenny Saville, Lubaina Himid, Peter Doig, Sonia Boyce, Steve McQueen and Tracey Emin.
- The UK is home to 12 of the world's 100 most visited museums and galleries.¹
- The UK is the second largest visual art market in the world and in 2023, UK visual art exports totalled over £4.1 billion – well over double the value of imports (£1.6 billion) and more than the UK's total goods and services exports to Greece (£3.8 billion) or Portugal (£3.3 billion).²
- According to global rankings, the UK is home to the world's two leading Art and Design universities, along with the top institution for History of Art.³

Taken together the sector is a significant economic force on both a national and local scale – visual artworks are one of the UK's top 30 exports and galleries have served as the cornerstone of many of the most successful local regeneration efforts in recent decades, from Margate (Turner Contemporary), to Wakefield (Hepworth Wakefield), to Dundee (V&A Dundee).⁴

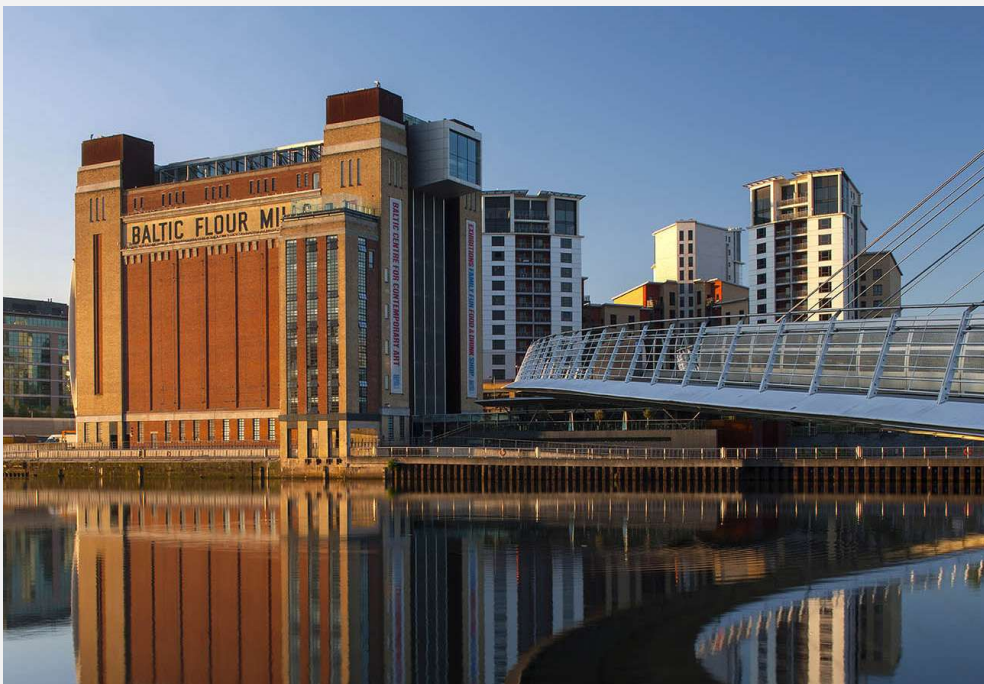
The visual arts also deliver significant public value. Engagement with the arts has been shown to boost mental health, reduce social isolation and, taken as a whole, the arts deliver an estimated £8 billion annually to the UK by enhancing quality of life and productivity.⁵

Visual arts education can support early years development, help equip children with essential skills for the 21st century (like critical thinking and creativity), improve school performance and attendance and develop specific skills that underpin careers in the UK's £124.6 billion creative industries.⁶

The arts deliver an estimated £8 billion annually to the UK by enhancing quality of life and productivity.



Visual artworks are one of the UK's top 30 exports and galleries have served as the cornerstone of many of the most successful local regeneration efforts in recent decades.



Top: Auction. Profits for charity. Photo by Pascal Deloche / GODONG
Bottom: BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. Photo by Graeme Peacock, 2020

However, despite growing evidence of the ways in which the visual arts can help the Government to achieve its core missions, the sector is facing mounting challenges. Falling public investment, rising global competition, and changing educational priorities have brought it to a crossroads. Not only are visual arts exports down £1.7 billion since 2018,⁷ but the sector is increasingly less able to deliver on the myriad of social benefits it offers. Without strategic action, its ability to sustain and grow its impact will be severely compromised.

This paper examines the value of the visual arts ecosystem, the barriers constraining its growth, and some of the opportunities that targeted investment could unlock. In particular, it explores how relatively modest yet strategic public funding, through the upcoming Spending Review and the accompanying industrial strategy, could enable the sector to become part of the infrastructure which delivers three key Government missions related to economic growth, health, and education.

Drawing on consultations with leaders across the public and private sectors – including CVAN (Contemporary Visual Arts Network), a-n The Artists Information Company, DACS (Design and Artists Copyright Society), Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations within the Plus Tate network and John Hansard Gallery as part of the University of Southampton – this paper sets out a series of recommendations to stabilise and strengthen the visual arts sector.

A key finding of our research is that sustained support for non-profit organisations – through both local and national funding mechanisms, including Arts Council England – will be essential to unlocking the full social and economic benefits of the visual arts sector. We also identify further areas of opportunity, particularly in health and education, which will require broader structural policy interventions. In addition, this paper makes four specific recommendations for the Comprehensive Spending Review, which are to:

1 Introduce a UK Cultural Investment Partnership Fund

Establish a permanent, centrally administered fund (modelled on the Canada Cultural Investment Fund) with three components:

- Emergency support for at-risk non-profits facing sudden financial shocks.
- Business model innovation funding to support risk-taking, income diversification, and partnerships (including with health and education providers).
- Matched capital and endowment funding to support development of studio space, long-term financial sustainability and decarbonisation.

2 Create a £5 million Grassroots Visual Arts Fund

Provide direct grants to small galleries and artist-led spaces for studio costs, exhibitions, and early-career talent development, mirroring the Grassroots Music Fund.

3 Expand Access to Creative Education in and out of School

While longer-term reforms to expand access to creative subjects in schools are underway, we recommend the Government builds on its recent support for the National Saturday Clubs by investing an additional £8.4 million per annum over four years to expand the programme from 122 to 1,000 clubs, providing free creative education to over 54,000 young people aged 13–16, with a focus on underserved areas. This would be a low-cost, high-impact intervention that would build skills, improve wellbeing, and open pathways to creative careers to everyone – not just a privileged few.

4 Restore Specialist Subject Funding for Creative Subjects in Higher Education

Reverse 2021 cuts to specialist subject funding to protect high-quality creative courses requiring industry-standard facilities. This is essential for the future workforce of the visual arts sector and wider creative economy.

We then highlight a number of policies which could help to deliver additional revenue, but are not in scope for the Comprehensive Spending Review – including those related to taxes, levies and trade frictions.

By making the right strategic interventions now, policymakers have the opportunity to secure the future of a sector that not only defines Britain's creative identity but also plays a role in its long-term prosperity. If adopted, our recommendations will help to reverse the £1.7 billion decline in visual arts exports,⁸ support new business models for the sector and drive greater social impact, particularly in relation to health and educational outcomes.

“ This report gives the Government the tools it needs to provide vital support for artists and the visual arts sector. We have a wealth of hugely talented artists in the UK, but that talent can't survive in isolation. If you give artists the support they need, they will thrive. If you don't, only the privileged will be able to become artists, and our culture will suffer as a result. ”

Dame Tracey Emin DBE

→ Please note: Many of the policy areas addressed in this paper – such as education and arts funding – are devolved matters. As this paper is intended for the UK Government ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review, its recommendations on devolved matters apply to England only.

Insight

Garth Gratrix, Artist, Director of Abingdon Studios and Clore Fellow⁹

“ In Blackpool, where working-class and LGBTQIA+ creativity thrives despite economic precarity, subsidised arts investment isn’t just support – it’s survival. Over the last five years, government-backed funding has directly shaped my trajectory, increasing my day rates, commissions, and visibility. These funds have connected me to people, places, and opportunities that transformed my practice from emergent to mid-career, proving that strategic investment builds sustainable creative futures.

Being an artist is a constant act of balance – a tightrope walk between seeking career visibility and creating space for others. As I navigate opportunities to sustain my own practice, I am equally committed to establishing studio and project space provision, ensuring that emerging and mid-career artists have the infrastructure to develop ambition and take up space. Leadership in the arts isn’t just about individual success; it’s about securing the conditions that allow creativity to thrive collectively.

For northern seaside pioneers like myself, commercial pipelines remain sparse compared to London-adjacent resorts. Strategic investment is needed to bridge the gap beyond digital engagement, ensuring artists

outside major cities are visible, collected, and sustained. The positive, fair-pay experiences in my career have come through government-supported initiatives and charities – the Arts and Humanities Research Council, a-n, ACE, local authorities, Clore, V&A, and Contemporary Art Society – as well as social and radical thinking that comes from regional and national independent studios and gallery provisions ensuring new work is developed critically, authentically and of relevance.

In recent years, this support has allowed me to test and present new work through group exhibitions and art fairs, culminating in my major solo show *Flamboyant Flamingos* at Grundy Art Gallery (2024), featuring Derek Jarman and Felix González-Torres.

Now, as I seek to grow my practice and representation, sustainability isn’t just about funding – it’s about fostering long-term, equitable relationships in an increasingly precarious landscape. The tightrope is always there, but with the right investment and vision we can take new risks and ‘undefine’ the sector to remain nuanced and a critical friend for growth. ”



Garth Gratrix, *Flamboyant Flamingos*, 2024, Grundy Art Gallery.
Photo by Benjamin Nuttall

1

The Visual Arts Ecosystem



Hew Locke, *The Procession*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, 2023. Tate Britain Commission 2022.

The UK's visual arts sector operates as an interconnected ecosystem.¹⁰ From artists and educators to galleries and audiences, every component plays a role in sustaining a vibrant – and genuinely world-leading – cultural landscape which includes:

Artists

anyone who creates visual arts, including professionals (who are in most cases freelancers) and amateurs. Some of the most successful living artists are British, including Anish Kapoor, Damien Hirst, David Hockney, Jenny Saville, Lubaina Himid, Peter Doig, Sonia Boyce, Steve McQueen and Tracey Emin. In 2023, 50,409 people in the UK listed their primary occupation as 'artist'.¹¹

Arts educators

art teachers inside and outside traditional education, including in schools, universities and colleges. The world's two leading art and design universities, along with the top institution for history of art, are located in the UK.¹²

Curators, commentators and researchers

those who critically engage with, interpret, and contextualise visual art, shaping public and scholarly understanding of art, influencing markets, audiences, and policy. The UK is home to world-leading art historical research and critical discourse, with significant contributions from institutions, independent researchers, and media outlets.

Distributors and promoters

galleries (commercial and publicly funded), auction houses, and other places people can buy, or the public can experience, visual artworks, including street art and art shown in heritage buildings and museums. The UK is home to 12 of the world's 100 most visited museums and galleries and is the second largest visual art market in the world.¹³

Audiences

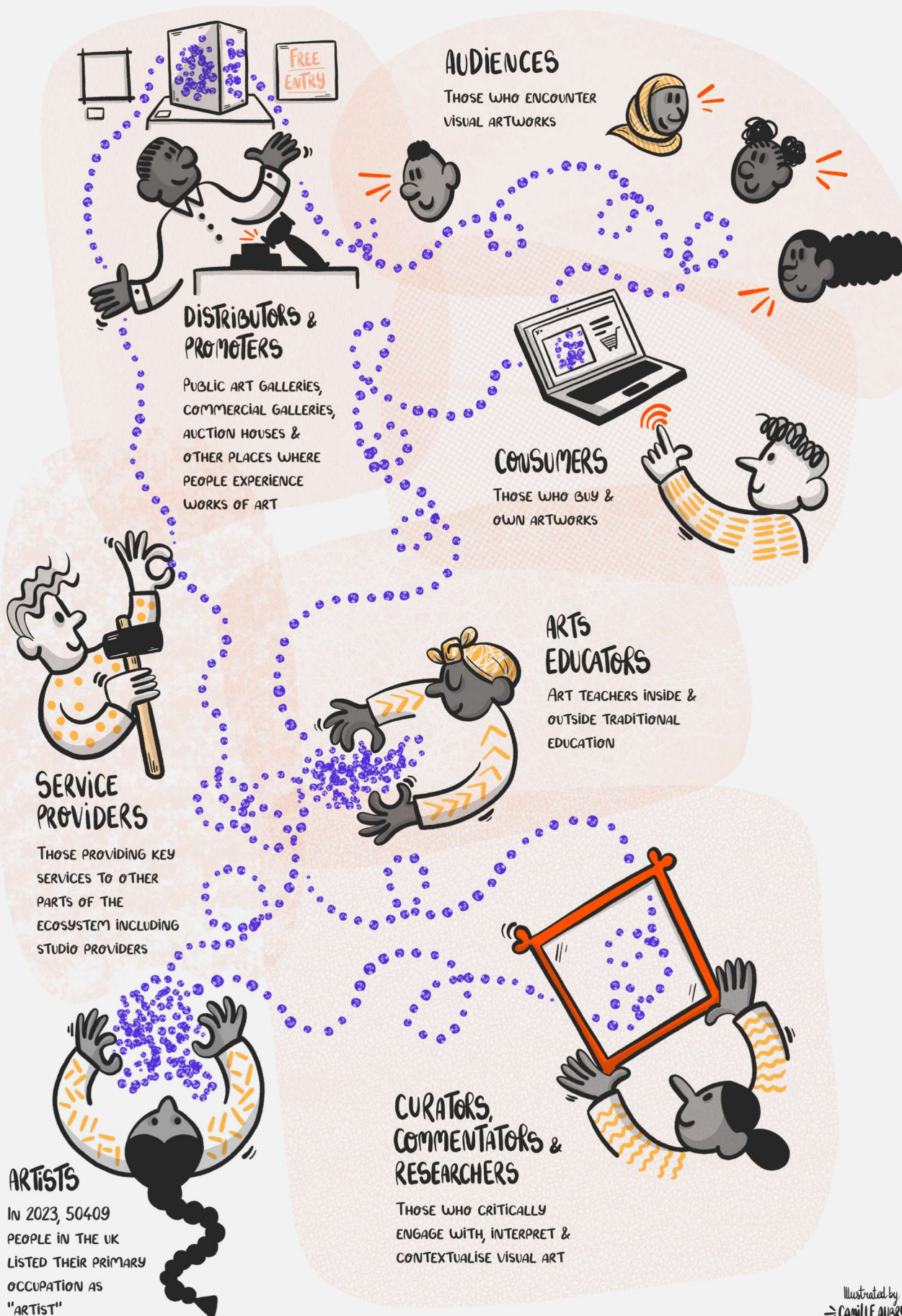
those who encounter visual artworks, including in museums, galleries and heritage buildings and as street art. Contemporary culture drives tourism to the UK, and the UK public is engaged with local culture. Young people have a particular interest in visual arts – 41% of audiences are aged 16–34, compared with 13% for most artforms.¹⁴

Consumers

those who buy and own art works.

Service providers

those providing key services to other parts of the ecosystem including studio providers (CVAN estimates that there are c.520 artists' studios in England), legal, finance, shippers and framers.



Illustrated by
⇒ CAMILLE AUBRY ⇒

In the past, different parts of the visual arts ecosystem have often been examined in isolation – by policymakers, academics, and even those within the sector. This paper takes a different approach, looking at the sector as a whole. As the quotes and case studies throughout make clear, artists, non-profit leaders, and those in the commercial visual arts consistently tell the same story: their challenges are interconnected. From global market pressures to limited access to creative education and declining investment in public institutions, a number of issues affect the entire ecosystem. Crucially, these insights also emphasise that success in one part of the sector can help lift the rest, and it is by working together that the sector can most meaningfully support key Government ambitions to improve health, education, and the economy.

Insight

Joe Scotland,
Director, Studio Voltaire¹⁵

“ The commercial art world is an integral part of the wider UK Creative Industries sector. At Studio Voltaire, we regularly partner with commercial galleries to help amplify our support for artists, as well as broaden our audience and community engagement. Time and again in my 25 years’ experience as a senior leader in the sector, I have seen the value of engagement and collaboration within the UK’s world leading art ecosystem. ”

Insight

Larry Achiampong, Artist¹⁶

“ The crisis facing the arts cuts across every strata.

First, it's not just established artists who are affected. I'm worried about young people. The arts are disappearing from the curriculum. In many state schools they evaporate somewhere between Key Stage 1 and 3. This is setting up a system where only the middle and higher classes can access the arts; a form of disenfranchisement. I've seen this happening firsthand with my own children.

At university, it's no better: courses are being shortened, fees are rising, and student numbers are growing without the resources to support them. Grants – like the one I received from the AHRC – are vital. They allow people like me, who come from poverty, to pursue higher education.

Then, on top of the education crisis, massive cuts to non-profits are being passed straight on to artists. Freelancers are being left behind – ignored by policymakers. And the economics of being an artist are getting worse – rising rents, especially for studio space, are pricing even successful artists out of cities like London. The risks here are huge. One is that artists will simply leave to countries like Germany, the Netherlands, or Canada, where support and conditions are better, even if they each have their own issues.

We can't let the arts become the preserve of the wealthy. If only one kind of person can afford to be an artist, the stories we tell will be narrower, less rich – basically, more boring. We need artists with a wide range of life experiences, but right now, we're heading in the opposite direction. ”



Larry Achiampong, *PAN AFRICAN FLAGS FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE (WESTMINSTER)*, 2022. Commissioned by Art on the Underground. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by GG Achard

A photograph showing three people engaged in a craft project. In the center, a woman with glasses and a brown sweater is pouring a white liquid from a measuring cup into a blue glove. To her left, another woman is smiling and looking at the project. To her right, a man in a yellow striped shirt is observing. They are working at a table with various materials and tools. The background is a simple, light-colored wall.

2

Raising Living Standards

This visual arts ecosystem represents a powerful economic force.

Works of art are one of the UK's top 30 goods exports.¹⁷ In 2023, UK visual art exports totalled over £4.1 billion – well over double the value of imports (£1.6 billion).¹⁸ To put that in perspective, over that year the UK exported more in visual art alone than its total goods and services exports to Greece (£3.8 billion) or Portugal (£3.3 billion).¹⁹

This is the continuation of a longstanding trend: [for the past decade, Britain has comfortably ranked as one of the world's three largest visual art markets, with an 18% global share in 2024.](#)²⁰

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) values the direct gross value added (GVA) of the art and antiques market at £0.8 billion.²¹ However, this almost certainly significantly underestimates the true figure, as major players like Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams are seemingly classified as general service providers (e.g. Bonham's 'nature of business' is listed in their submissions to Companies House as 'Other service activities not elsewhere classified'). Given that this is likely the classification used to generate the GVA statistics, we can infer that the value they create is excluded from official estimates of the art market and the wider creative industries.²²

Unsurprisingly, given the UK is home to 12 of the world's 100 most-visited museums and galleries, these institutions also make a substantial direct economic contribution to the economy, generating £0.9 billion in GVA.²³

In addition, visual arts organisations play a key role in strengthening the UK's soft power and helping to attract international visitors, delivering a further economic dividend. The 2024 Anholt Nation Brands Index ranked the UK 5th out of 50 countries, highlighting culture and tourism as major strengths – particularly contemporary culture, which ranked 4th overall.²⁴ While it is difficult to isolate the exact number of tourists drawn solely by cultural attractions, data from City Hall suggests that four in five visitors to London cite 'culture' as their main reason for coming. This points to a strong spillover effect from investment in the visual arts, with tourism contributing £48 billion in direct GVA to the UK economy, and £106 billion when including both direct and indirect impacts.²⁵

London is undeniably the heart of the UK's visual arts market, and plays host to many of its most visited museums and galleries. However, visual artists and organisations across the country play a role in local and regional development, supporting economic growth, regeneration initiatives, and community empowerment. In Margate, for example, Turner Contemporary has been central to the town's renewal, generating over £70 million for the local economy.²⁶ In its first five years, V&A Dundee generated an estimated £304 million for the Scottish economy, including £109 million for Dundee itself, and created 450 local jobs.²⁷ The Hepworth Wakefield has returned £9.43 to the local Yorkshire economy for every £1 of revenue funding invested by Wakefield Council.²⁸



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Top: Kate MacGarry, Frieze London 2024. Photo by Linda Ny Lind.
Courtesy Frieze / Linda Ny Lind.
Bottom: Frieze London 2024.
Photo by Linda Ny Lind.
Courtesy Frieze / Linda Ny Lind.

The visual arts contribute to this local economic growth in many ways – not least by making places more attractive to new residents and visitors. But their impact goes further: they also play a role in supporting wider creative industries growth on a local scale. Evidence suggests that creative firms tend to cluster around public arts institutions. That is why a recent paper from the RSA, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), and Arts Council England (ACE) argues that, as the Government develops creative industries clusters and economic corridors, arts and cultural institutions could serve as key ‘nodes’ – drawing in tourism, investment, jobs, and offering vital platforms for creative talent.²⁹

The value of the visual arts to communities is not limited to high-growth clusters. Artists and visual arts organisations should be recognised as part of the critical infrastructure of place, a point argued in recent research by the Bennett Institute at the University of Cambridge.³⁰

When embedded locally, the visual arts can deliver long-term benefits to quality of life and community resilience. Organisations like Take A Part (founded in 2009 as part of a regeneration initiative in Efford, Plymouth, through Labour’s Building Communities for the Future programme) offer an alternative model that can provide valuable lessons for this form of cultural devolution. Their work shows that placing artists at the heart of regeneration efforts can lead to tangible improvements in education, reductions in anti-social behaviour, and enhancements to local infrastructure, strengthening the social fabric of communities.³¹

The Government’s decision to provide additional funding to six mayoral authorities in the Spending Review offers an opportunity to attract further industrial investment and embed placemaking initiatives into long-term growth strategies. For these efforts to succeed, it is essential that funding supports the full breadth of the regional visual arts ecosystem – from artist studios and community projects to education programmes and galleries.

Another area of UK strength is our world-leading higher education infrastructure in the visual arts. In 2024, the QS rankings once again named the Royal College of Art (RCA) and University of the Arts London (UAL) as the top two institutions for art and design in the world. The Glasgow School of Art also appeared in the top 20.³² The UK is also home to the world’s leading institution in history of art (RCA) with another four in the top twenty.³³

Students from around the world pay to attend these institutions – contributing directly to our economy – and these organisations also provide the skills which help to support the UK’s £124.6 billion creative industries.³⁴ Research has shown that almost half of graduates working in the creative industries studied creative subjects at university.³⁵

Insight

Tom Christopherson, Chairman, The British Art Market Federation³⁶

“ The UK art market has the second largest share of the global art market and is an important hub for international art business, bringing cultural visitors from around the world to UK galleries, art fairs and premier auctions. Integral to this are the art market's close relationships and crossover of staff and expertise with academic and public arts institutions, with which it also maintains close commercial links. It is this ‘cultural critical mass’ involving the commercial and the wider arts world which sustains the UK's role as a centre for arts and culture, with all the ancillary benefits that brings including tourism, employment, and international profile. ”



Lehmann Maupin, Frieze London 2024. Photo by Linda Nylind. Courtesy of Frieze and Linda Nylind.

Case Study

Regional growth at Eastbourne ALIVE

Eastbourne ALIVE was an ambitious cultural programme coinciding with Towner Eastbourne hosting Turner Prize 2023 which presented partnerships, exhibitions and community projects all aimed at providing long-lasting cultural change in Eastbourne. It encompassed a wide-ranging programme of 385 activities, including the reanimation of underused spaces through public art, dance, and music events as well as school visits to Towner Eastbourne, community events, screenings, commissions and exhibitions.

Alongside the Turner Prize, the programme brought £16.1 million in value to Eastbourne, alongside 200,000 visitors. This means a return on investment (ROI) for the project as a whole of 19.3, which means that for every £1 spent on hosting Turner Prize 2023, a return of £19.30 was generated for Eastbourne.



Jesse Darling, Turner Prize Winner 2023, Towner Eastbourne, Photo by Angus Mill

Insight

Polly Mackenzie, Chief Social Purpose Officer, University of the Arts London

“ The UK is home to the best visual arts education in the world, and our graduates fuel the creative industries that drive economic growth. At UAL, we thrive as part of an extraordinary ecosystem – world-class museums and galleries, a dynamic private art market, and a culture of innovation that makes London a global arts capital. But even the strongest institutions face significant challenges. If we want to sustain this creative powerhouse, we must recognise the pressures on higher education and ensure that the foundations of this ecosystem remain strong. ”



BACKLIT, Nottingham

Case Study

Strengthening the Visual Arts Ecology in the West of England

The West of England Visual Arts Alliance (WEVAA) was established in 2019 to create a more sustainable, inclusive, and ambitious visual arts sector across Bristol and the West of England. Through a strategic three-year programme supported by £1.18 million from Arts Council England, WEVAA has invested in artists, expanded professional development, increased access to creative opportunities, and strengthened the region's cultural infrastructure. The alliance represents diverse sectors including local authorities, universities, arts organisations and institutions, and an artist-led collective to drive change through shared learning, knowledge exchange and innovation.

Key challenges that they aimed to address included national issues:

- Limited career progression opportunities for artists and arts workers.
- A lack of accessible funding and professional support, particularly for global majority, disabled, and low-income artists.
- An underdeveloped cultural infrastructure, with few dedicated spaces for visual arts practice.

As well as issues specific to Bristol and the West of England, identified in the recently published Bristol Visual Arts Review:

- The need for a collaborative commissioning programme in the region.
- A need to strengthen the offer of Bristol and the West of England as a visual arts destination for both audiences and practitioners.



Young In Hong, *Five Acts*,
2024, Spike Island.
Photo by Dan Weill

To address these, WEVAA developed a multi-strand programme which included investments in artist development, new work, community building and infrastructure, as well as an artist-led programme of projects including commissions, residencies, and events. Over three years, it directly supported over 1,254 artists, providing mentoring, training, and financial bursaries to remove barriers to progression. It also commissioned 25 new artworks, bringing high-profile exhibitions to local audiences and giving South West-based artists national and international visibility. The project resulted in 87,446 audience visits to exhibitions and artist-led projects.

A significant impact of WEVAA has been its role in strengthening the cultural infrastructure. New cultural roadmaps were developed for Bath and Weston-super-Mare, with investment in engagement and trialling new initiatives; and Bristol City Council's Cultural Infrastructure Action Plan (CIAP) was shaped in part by WEVAA's advocacy, helping embed long-term strategies for artist support. Meanwhile, partnerships with universities and arts organisations, including Spike Island, Super Culture, Creative Youth Network, and Visual Arts South West, have created lasting frameworks for professional development and public engagement.

As WEVAA concludes its initial three-year programme, it leaves a legacy of a stronger, more connected, and more inclusive visual arts ecosystem in the West of England. However, longer-term investment will be essential in sustaining these gains, ensuring that artists at all stages of their careers can thrive.



Rachael Clerke, Art Business Ltd, 2024. Photo Ruby Turner

3

Supporting Wellbeing and Health Outcomes

Opening Celebration, Elsa James, *It Should Not Be Forgotten*, Firstsite, 2025. Photo by Jayne Lloyd

The link between the arts and human happiness is intuitive, but in recent decades, a growing body of academic research has been able to quantify the ways in which arts engagement can improve physical and mental health and reduce social isolation. These positive outcomes are observed both through general participation in creative activities and, increasingly, through targeted initiatives like social prescribing, arts programmes in hospitals, or specialised community-based arts provision.

A 2024 study by Frontier Economics for the DCMS as part of its Cultural Heritage Capital Framework (CHC) highlighted the scale of these benefits. It found that cultural participation – such as drawing, painting, or visiting galleries – not only supports pain relief, enhanced wellbeing, and reduced medication use, but also delivers an estimated £8 billion annually in economic value by boosting quality of life and productivity.³⁷ A major 2024 international review of ‘Arts on Prescription’ programmes also found substantial improvements in participants’ psychosocial wellbeing. Its meta-analysis showed these were statistically significant, with qualitative evidence highlighting further social and psychological benefits.³⁸

Mental health is one of the clearest areas where the arts have a meaningful impact. Evidence shows that engagement with the arts improves population-wide wellbeing – put simply, it makes people happier – and can also support more focussed responses to mental health needs.³⁹

This is particularly important at a time when mental health challenges are growing. Between 2012 and 2022, emergency hospital admissions for children aged 5 to 18 experiencing mental health crises rose by 65%, and a Rethink Mental Illness survey found that 80% of people seeking NHS mental health services in the past two years faced delays, worsening their condition.⁴⁰

While acute responses to address these rising demands remain essential, there is increasing recognition that prevention and early intervention must play a larger role. For example, the Education Policy Institute has warned that Government responses to the mental health crisis in young people have focussed too narrowly on the most severe cases, overlooking the need to invest in strategies that build resilience and support mental wellbeing earlier on.⁴¹ This suggests a role for the greater use of community assets – such as culture and the arts – to address the social determinants of health and reduce growing health inequalities across generations.⁴²

Young people, in particular, appear to benefit from structured group arts activities, which have been shown to build resilience and offer emotional support – key goals in early intervention strategies. One study found that 93% of 16–18-year-olds felt studying a creative subject had a positive impact on their wellbeing.



Young people, in particular, appear to benefit from structured group arts activities, which have been shown to build resilience and offer emotional support – key goals in early intervention strategies. One study found that 93% of 16–18-year-olds felt studying a creative subject had a positive impact on their wellbeing.⁴³ Programmes like Arts Boost, which delivers structured arts activities to 12–17-year-olds with mild to moderate mental health difficulties across Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Ceredigion, offer a working model to provide these activities outside of the curriculum. According to Angela Lodwick, Assistant Director of Mental Health and Learning Disabilities for Hywel Dda Universal Health Board, such initiatives provide ‘a safe space to allow for recovery, promote resilience and coping skills, and increase a sense of empowerment’.⁴⁴

There is also mounting evidence for the benefits of arts engagement to health in later life. [Meta analysis by Queen Mary University of London, analysing 39 studies from 21 countries, found that among 3,360 older adults \(over 55\) with depression and 949 with anxiety, taking part in group arts interventions reduced their symptoms at a level comparable with traditional treatments such as antidepressants, talking therapies, or physical activity.](#)⁴⁵ These benefits were especially pronounced in care home settings.

Dulwich Picture Gallery offers a compelling example of how cultural institutions can help to deliver this kind of support to older adults. The gallery runs a range of dementia-friendly initiatives, including Creative Conversations guided by trained facilitators, and digital resources developed with Armchair Gallery, enabling those unable to visit in person to explore collections and take part in creative activities. It also delivers creative workshops in partnership with the Lambeth and Southwark Alzheimer’s Society, providing tailored support for people living with dementia and those who care for them.⁴⁶

Arts and health initiatives can also produce valuable outcomes that are less easily measured – particularly in communities facing systemic barriers. Projects like Black Men’s Minds, which was an immersive audio-visual installation exploring the mental health experiences of black men, demonstrate how the arts can foster agency and community in ways that traditional mental health services often cannot.⁴⁷ This effect is in part because, as research by the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance highlights, a large proportion of the arts provision supporting mental health is delivered by people with their own lived experience of mental health concerns.⁴⁸

By amplifying voices that are frequently excluded from mainstream mental health discourse, projects like this also help expose the deep-rooted inequalities that shape the mental health system.⁴⁹

Ethnicity remains a significant factor in both access to and quality of treatment, and the arts offer a powerful means of confronting these systemic issues – improving not only how services are designed, but also the outcomes they deliver.⁵⁰

Beyond participation, the visual arts also contribute to health by shaping more humane and therapeutic care environments. We all recognise that we would prefer to spend time in a well-designed hospital or care home, and there is evidence showing the measurable benefits of such environments. The King's Fund's Enhancing the Healing Environment (EHE) programme demonstrated how aesthetic improvements to care environments can raise care quality and improve outcomes: for example, they found that design improvements could reduce falls and aggressive behaviour in people with dementia.⁵¹

The high demand for EHE training and funding illustrates the appetite across the health sector for practical guidance on creating more supportive, person-centred environments.⁵²

The benefits of the arts in care environments extend to healthcare staff. In a study of visual and performing arts in healthcare settings, two-thirds of employees at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital reported that the hospital's design (its architecture, use of light and colour, visual art and live music) had a major influence on their decision to apply for or remain in their role.⁵³

While these examples point to the significant potential of arts in health, there are still structural challenges. Phoenix Takes Flight, a research paper on community-based health support through social prescribing highlights issues of scalability, sustainability, and integration. It points to a persistent short-termism in how arts and health interventions are funded and delivered, and calls for more investment in experimentation, system integration, long-term funding models, and workforce development.⁵⁴

Through the publication of the Creative Health Review and their response to the Government's 10-Year Health Plan Consultation, the National Centre for Creative Health has gathered further evidence and examples showing how creative health can improve wellbeing and ease pressure on the NHS and other public services. They have recommended a cross-departmental Creative Health Strategy at the national level to unlock the full potential of creative health in addressing major policy challenges, including health inequalities and rising rates of poor mental health.⁵⁵

Case Study

Embedding Creativity in Health and Social Care at Project Art Works

Project Art Works is an independent visual arts organisation and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) based in Hastings, the 13th most deprived town in England with a quarter of children living in poverty.⁵⁶ It bridges the cultural and social care sectors, collaborating with neurodivergent artists, families, caregivers, and professionals to promote inclusive creative practice and advocacy.

Project Art Works is widely recognised for its excellence in contemporary visual art and inclusive practice. The organisation has received multiple high-profile awards, including a nomination for the Turner Prize (2021), a Calouste Gulbenkian Award for Civic Arts Organisations (2022), and were joint winners of the Film London Jarman Prize (2020). Its collaborative approach has influenced national and international cultural programming, setting new standards in the integration of art and care.

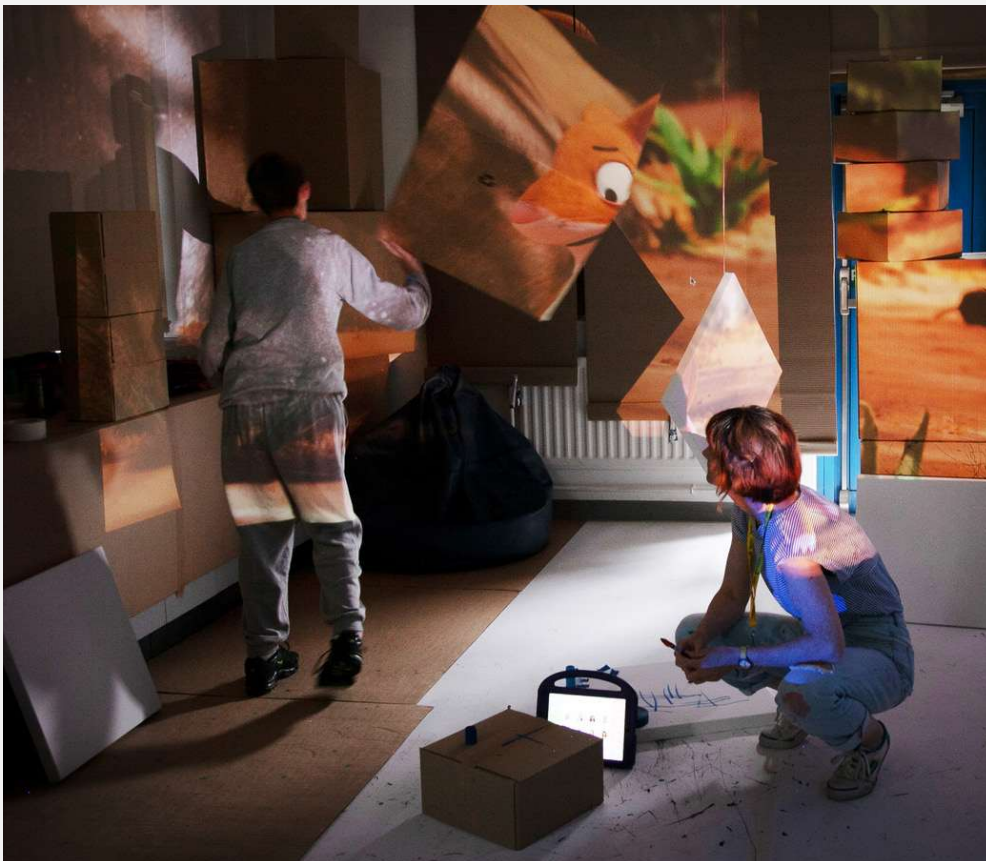
Through its work, Project Art Works provides essential support that benefits the health and social care sectors by:

- **Enhancing Wellbeing**
A programme of work called Art Freedom Care supports 50 neurodivergent artists, fostering autonomy, communication, and improved mental health.
- **Reducing Carer Burnout**
The Support Collective, a network of 300+ families and caregivers, offers peer support, training, and advocacy to navigate complex care systems.
- **Early Intervention for Young People**
Art Breaks provides creative workshops for 90+ children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) annually, helping develop communication and coping skills.
- **Influencing Policy and Practice**
Collaborations with cultural and health institutions improve care models, ensuring neurodivergent people have access to meaningful creative opportunities.

Project Art Works recently received capital funding through Arts Council England and Levelling Up Partnerships which will support them in developing a Centre for Art and Care (opening in 2025) to expand partnerships with the NHS, Integrated Care Boards, and Adult Social Care. This will:

- Provide a therapeutic creative environment for neurodivergent individuals.
- Offer professional development for healthcare providers on inclusive practice.
- Develop co-creation models that integrate art into health and social care settings.

Long-term funding would enable far deeper collaboration with the health sector, supporting preventative care, reducing reliance on crisis services, and improving outcomes for neurodivergent people and their caregivers.



Project Art Works, studio programme workshops, 2024

Case Study

Transforming Lives Through Personal Development at The King's Trust and John Hansard Gallery

The King's Trust partnered with the John Hansard Gallery to offer a placement that would leverage the power of the visual arts to transform lives. The experience of the individual on this programme indicates the potential power in the arts to tackle complex issues like social isolation and depression.

Before joining the programme, the participant faced significant mental health challenges:

- Diagnosed with social anxiety and depression.
- Struggled to maintain employment.
- Experienced self-harm and a mental health crisis including an overdose attempt.

The programme provided structured support through personal development, mentorship, and tailored creative activities including those aiming to rebuild this individual's confidence.

Key impacts included:

- Rebuilt self-confidence and developed social skills.
- Improved time management and financial literacy.
- Created a supportive peer network.
- Reconnected with family and regained personal agency.
- Secured long-term employment at the gallery.

Through the partnership between The King's Trust and John Hansard Gallery, this individual gained not just practical skills but also hope, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose.

“ I strive every day to be a better employee for the gallery, and I couldn't be happier with where I am today. ”



Get Started workshop with Jill Maguire, The King's Trust and John Hansard Gallery, 2024

Case Study

Hospital Rooms – Transforming Mental Health Care Through Art

Mental health hospitals can be stark and abrasive places that are devoid of hope and imagination. The Care Quality Commission assessed that the environment of mental health hospitals was often not therapeutic, and that the noisy and chaotic nature of the wards could add to people's distress.⁵⁷ They present a vivid visual and sensory reflection of how society values those experiencing severe mental illness, who have also too often been subject to wider racial, socio-economic or disability related prejudice and disadvantage.

Hospital Rooms is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, which as a charity raises funding from NHS Trusts as well as individuals, trusts, and corporate partners. Since 2016, Hospital Rooms has undertaken a number of acclaimed projects, completed in some of the most challenging mental health settings.

One intervention took place in 2021-23 at Springfield University Hospital in Tooting. Hospital Rooms delivered over 150 artist-led workshops for mental health in-patients and staff and installed 23 major artworks by 25 world class artists, the majority of whom identify as ethnically diverse, for the new hospital across inpatient, outpatient and communal areas.

The process proved transformative for many of those who took part, who were able to see themselves and be seen by others in a new light. 95% of participating patients strongly agree about their experience that "It opened my mind to new possibilities," "I did something I didn't know I was capable of", and "It helped me to feel part of the community."

“ When arriving on the ward, seeing art made me feel reassured and offered a connection to the space and others in a different and positive way ” Workshop participant, Avalon Ward.



Yinka Ilori, Atrium Detail, Springfield Hospital. Photo by Damian Griffiths. Courtesy of Hospital Rooms



4

Improving Educational Attainment

The UK Government has identified ‘breaking down barriers to opportunity’ as a central mission, with an initial focus on giving children the best start in life.⁵⁸ Beyond the significant mental health benefits of the arts to young people, which have been outlined, the visual arts can contribute to this goal in four key ways:

- Supporting early years development.
- Equipping all children with essential skills for the 21st century.
- Improving wider school performance and attendance.
- Developing specific skills that underpin long-term, meaningful careers and a thriving economy.

The value of visual arts education begins early. International studies have shown that childhood engagement in the arts can predict academic performance throughout the school years, with the greatest impact seen when such engagement starts at a young age.⁵⁹ As the Government works towards having 75% of five-year-olds in England ‘ready to learn’ by the time they start school, there is a clear opportunity to use the country’s existing arts infrastructure to support this ambition.⁶⁰

The demand for this sort of provision already exists. Since introducing three bespoke early-years programmes – Toddler Time, Wonder and Wander, and Artists Commissions – the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead has seen a 14% increase in its family audience, which translates to 169,776 family visits (out of a total of 414,088 visits) in the last financial year. Each year, nearly 179,000 visitors now engage with its free learning initiatives.⁶¹ Parents are clearly seeking high-quality arts programming. The challenge is not in attracting interest, but in sustaining and expanding provision given the challenges outlined in the next chapter.

Beyond early development, arts education continues to offer unique value throughout the school years and into adult life.

Currently, the UK is facing a serious skills shortage and persistent productivity problems, with one of the highest skills mismatches in the G7.⁶³ It is estimated that around 90% of the current workforce will need to upskill by 2030.⁶⁴ Parents, too, recognise the gap: over 70% believe the education system places too little emphasis on preparing young people for work, while 84% say it neglects the development of essential life skills.⁶⁵

In this context, a creative education should not be seen as a luxury.

That is because creative subjects encourage young people to think innovatively, explore new ideas, and develop original interpretations – fostering creativity and critical thinking rather than merely striving for predetermined answers or meeting rigid criteria.⁶⁶ Although science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM subjects, are often positioned as the primary drivers of economic growth, sidelining the arts, studies on the future of work suggest this is an unhelpful binary. Employers are likely to increasingly value creative thinking and skills, which act as complements to digital and tech expertise, not alternatives.⁶⁷

Creative subjects are particularly important feeders into the creative industries themselves, which have grown at over 1.5 times the rate of the wider economy over the past decade.⁶⁸ Currently, 10.5% of creative businesses report skills gaps, and a third of all their vacancies are attributed to skills shortages.⁶⁹ While we lack detailed data on the school subjects studied by the creative industries workforce, nearly half of graduates in the sector took creative subjects at university (note: these include subjects which aren't part of the school curriculum, such as architecture and computer games).⁷⁰

These figures underscore the role of creative education in developing future talent pipelines – not only for the creative economy, but for a labour market increasingly dependent on the fusion of creativity, critical thinking, and digital fluency.

Crucially, subjects like art and design and history of art also foster visual literacy: the ability to read, interpret, and respond to visual information. In a world where more than 3.2 billion photos and 720,000 hours of video are uploaded daily, this skill is becoming essential.⁷¹

Beyond giving young people the tools to navigate the increasing prevalence of disinformation and digitally manipulated imagery, emerging research from the University of Oxford is exploring how visual literacy links with broader outcomes such as academic attainment, oracy, and social development.⁷² Art UK's The Superpower of Looking programme, funded and supported by Freeland's Foundation, is a practical intervention in this area, providing a set of free teaching resources utilising Art UK's extensive digital collection to help children to critically observe, analyse, question, interpret, and empathise, using images as the starting point.⁷³

Arts participation has also been linked to other positive outcomes – for example improved school attendance – a crucial finding given that one in five pupils in England were persistently absent in the autumn term 2023–24 (i.e. missed 10% or more half-days).⁷⁴

Case Study

Expanding Engagement Through Inclusive Family Programming at The Box

The Box, an ambitious five-year-old museum, gallery, and archive based in Plymouth (within the 20% most deprived local authority districts in England)⁶², is committed to making culture accessible to all. Since opening in 2020, it has welcomed over 950,000 visitors, with learning and engagement at the heart of its mission.

Key challenges facing local audiences include:

- Barriers to participation for underrepresented audiences.
- Limited access to creative activities for families facing financial hardship.
- Underrepresentation of global majority artists in arts and heritage education.

To address these, The Box delivers a dynamic family programme, integrating multiple art forms and lived experiences. In 2023–24, its free drop-in workshops – linked to their exhibitions and collections programme – engaged 27,389 participants in 2023–24, with 24,287 already reached in 2024–25.

A key focus is early years programming. ‘I Wonder’, one The Box’s flagship family initiatives, encourages family engagement through hands-on creative activities, including for under-5s. Since its 2020 launch, it has provided weekly, themed workshops aligned with current exhibitions. Despite reaching 1,335 participants in 2024–25, cost remains a barrier for some families.

To expand access, The Box is seeking funding to make early childhood engagement more inclusive. Partnerships with other museums, galleries, and mission-driven charities like the Royal Foundation could help deliver a national framework supporting early years creativity, encouraging positive physical, emotional and cognitive development through engagement with art and culture.

5

The Challenges Inhibiting Growth and Impact

Daniel Buren, *Catch as catch can*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by John McKenzie 2014

Despite its genuinely world-leading strengths, the UK's visual arts ecosystem faces a series of interlinked challenges that impact nearly every part of its ecosystem. Declining public investment, increased global competition, and shifting educational priorities have contributed to a sector under significant strain.

Pressures facing commercial organisations

The UK's position as a major global player in the commercial visual arts market is under threat. [While exports remain impressive, they have fallen by £1.7 billion since 2018 \(a 30% decrease in comparison to a 15% decrease in the global art market\).](#)⁷⁵ This decline is driven by multiple factors, including those related to the wider ecosystem. In addition, the sector is in need of additional support due to intensified competition from the US and China, and is suffering from the impact of increased regulatory burdens, customs complexities, rising costs, and delays following the UK's departure from the European Union. Depending on whether artworks are exempt, US tariffs may mean additional complexity given the dominance of the US art market globally.⁷⁶

Pressures restricting arts education

The effects of consecutive UK Government policies on the arts in primary and secondary schools in England have been well documented.

Although official subject-level statistics for primary schools are not available, a 2019 survey of primary teachers in England found that 68% reported a reduction in arts provision in their schools since 2010, and 49% felt the quality of provision had declined.⁷⁷ In 2022, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Art, Craft and Design Education funded a separate survey of teachers, which revealed that the specialist training primary teachers receive in England is insufficient for teaching these subjects. According to the APPG survey, [universities reported offering only 3 to 12 hours of training in art, craft and design across an entire one-year PGCE course.](#)⁷⁸

Arts and cultural organisations have attempted to step in to fill these gaps, but themselves have experienced significant funding cuts over the last two decades.

The situation in secondary schools in England has been particularly severe. Between 2011–2012 and 2022–2023, the number of secondary school teachers in art and design and design and technology fell by 9% and 52%, respectively. Over the same period, GCSE entries in these subjects declined by 4% and 73%.⁷⁹ The Cultural Learning Alliance's 2025 'Report Card' shows that GCSE and A-Level arts uptake is lowest in areas with the highest deprivation and free school meal rates, highlighting a clear socioeconomic gap in access.⁸⁰ They highlight research from the DCMS which shows that this gap extends to extra-curricular opportunities: only 56% of children in the two most deprived fifths of the country access extracurricular activities, compared to 76% in the most affluent fifth.⁸¹

Many have suggested that the key factor in this decline has been the introduction of school accountability measures that deprioritised creative subjects. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc), which assesses school performance based on student attainment in English, mathematics, history or geography, two sciences, and a language, excludes creative subjects entirely. Progress 8, another accountability measure, places greater weight on EBacc subjects, reinforcing the same trend.⁸² The Labour Party has indicated plans to reform these measures.⁸³

Concerns are also acute around the provision of art history. Despite the UK's global leadership in the art market, fewer than 1% of state schools currently teach the subject – limiting access to this key sector to a narrow and unrepresentative group. According to the latest figures from Pearson, just 723 students sat the A Level in art history in 2023.⁸⁴

In further and higher education, arts-focussed institutions continue to warn of chronic underfunding.⁸⁵

Specifically, in recent years, several universities have announced job cuts, disproportionately affecting arts subjects. Among them is Goldsmiths, a globally recognised leader in art history, as ranked by the QS global rankings.⁸⁶ Compounding these challenges, last year saw the Conservative Government announce plans to freeze grants that help cover the additional costs of undergraduate courses in music, drama, fashion, and other arts disciplines in England.⁸⁷

Whilst some visual arts organisations have been able to develop successful apprenticeship schemes numbers across the sector still remain low (fewer than 300 apprenticeship starts across music, performing and visual arts in 2020–21).⁸⁸

Case Study

Supporting Primary School Teachers through Think Talk Make Art

Think Talk Make Art was a two-year initiative devised by Newlyn Art Gallery and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Teacher Development Fund (the award was for £149,000). It was created to empower non-specialist primary teachers to confidently integrate art into their teaching, as art was increasingly absent from primary teacher training courses. More broadly, it was hoped that the initiative could provide a potential model for the retraining of primary and secondary school teachers following drops in provision and training budget.

Through the project, nine primary schools across West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly transformed their environments by creating inspirational in-school art galleries. These galleries showcased artworks borrowed from the Arts Council Collection and the Cornwall Council Schools Art Collection.

The programme supported local teachers to utilise these artworks as a resource that could help shape their professional development. It encouraged educators to investigate cross-curricular approaches, reflect on their practices, refine lesson plans and embed learning across the schools.

Network building was central to the project. Participants benefitted from peer learning opportunities, such as comparing lesson content with secondary art teachers and observing best practices modelled by renowned primary practitioner Mandy Barrett. Additionally, respected educationalist Susan Coles provided curriculum leadership, helping teachers navigate the complexities of curriculum design and educational policy.



Think Talk Make Art workshop at Newlyn Art Gallery, photo Steve Tanner.

Pressures facing non-profit galleries

A combination of post-pandemic economic pressures, inflation, and technological underinvestment has resulted in a fragile non-profit arts sector, with many organisations struggling to realise their full economic and social potential.

Public funding enables non-profit arts organisations to carry out work that the market alone would not support. This includes expanding access to underserved areas and communities, delivering social and health benefits, providing educational resources, and fostering innovation across artforms.

However, sustained cuts over recent decades have weakened this part of the ecosystem. The UK now ranks below many European countries in terms of the proportion of GDP spent on culture, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of its visual arts infrastructure and the benefits it provides.⁸⁹ For comparison, the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe allocates around €600 million annually to cultural funding (c. £513 million) – more than the combined annual budgets of Arts Council England for the National Portfolio (£458.5 million per annum) and the Mayor of London’s culture programme (£18.7 million in 2024–25).⁹⁰

Local government has historically been the largest funder of the arts across all four nations of the UK. Yet, significant reductions in their arts budgets (Fig. 1) have not only jeopardised their own investments but have also set off a domino effect. Other funders have attempted to plug the gap, but without increases to their budgets, the overall result has been a shrinking pool of support.

The organisation perhaps impacted by this the most in England is Arts Council England (ACE), who also plays a key role in funding the visual arts. In its 2023–2026 portfolio, [ACE is supporting 157 visual arts National Portfolio Organisations \(NPOs\) and Investment Principles Support Organisations \(IPSOs\), receiving a combined total of £47,372,659. This compares to £64,676,459 allocated to 140 music organisations and £111,574,250 to 195 theatre organisations.](#)⁹¹

This relatively small amount produces a wealth of activity: in 2023–24 there were 3,431,000 attendees to exhibitions across Arts Council England portfolio-funded visual arts organisations.⁹²

However, ACE’s support for the sector has also been affected by wider funding trends. Between 2009–10 and 2022–23, ACE’s core grant-in-aid funding fell by 18% per person in real terms.⁹³

Following Brexit, the UK chose not to participate in Creative Europe, despite remaining eligible. This decision cut off another valuable source of funding to visual arts organisations and individual artists – €3.5 million had been awarded to UK cultural projects in 2018 alone – as well as opportunities to build international communities of practice.⁹⁴

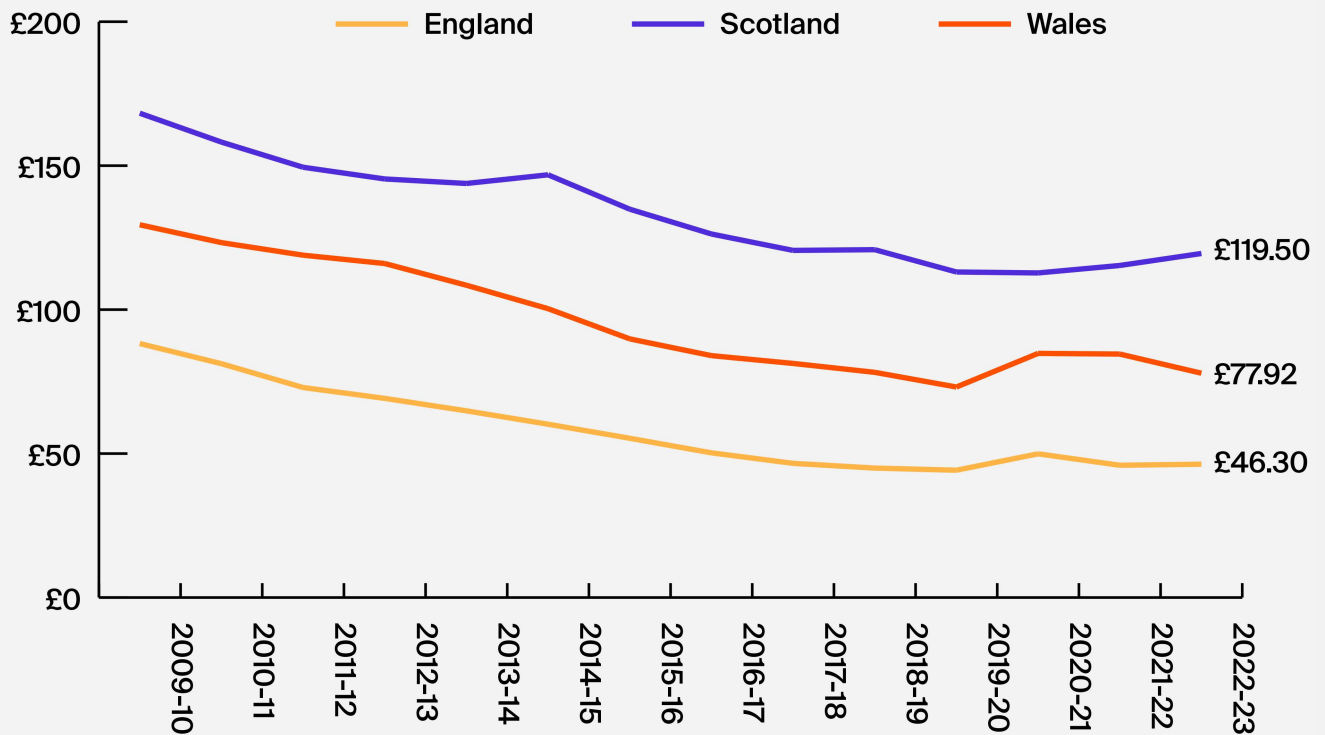


Fig 1. Data analysed by the Campaign for the Arts and the University of Warwick on the local authority revenue spending on cultural and related services per person, 2009-10 to 2022-23 (real terms, 2022-23 prices)⁹⁵

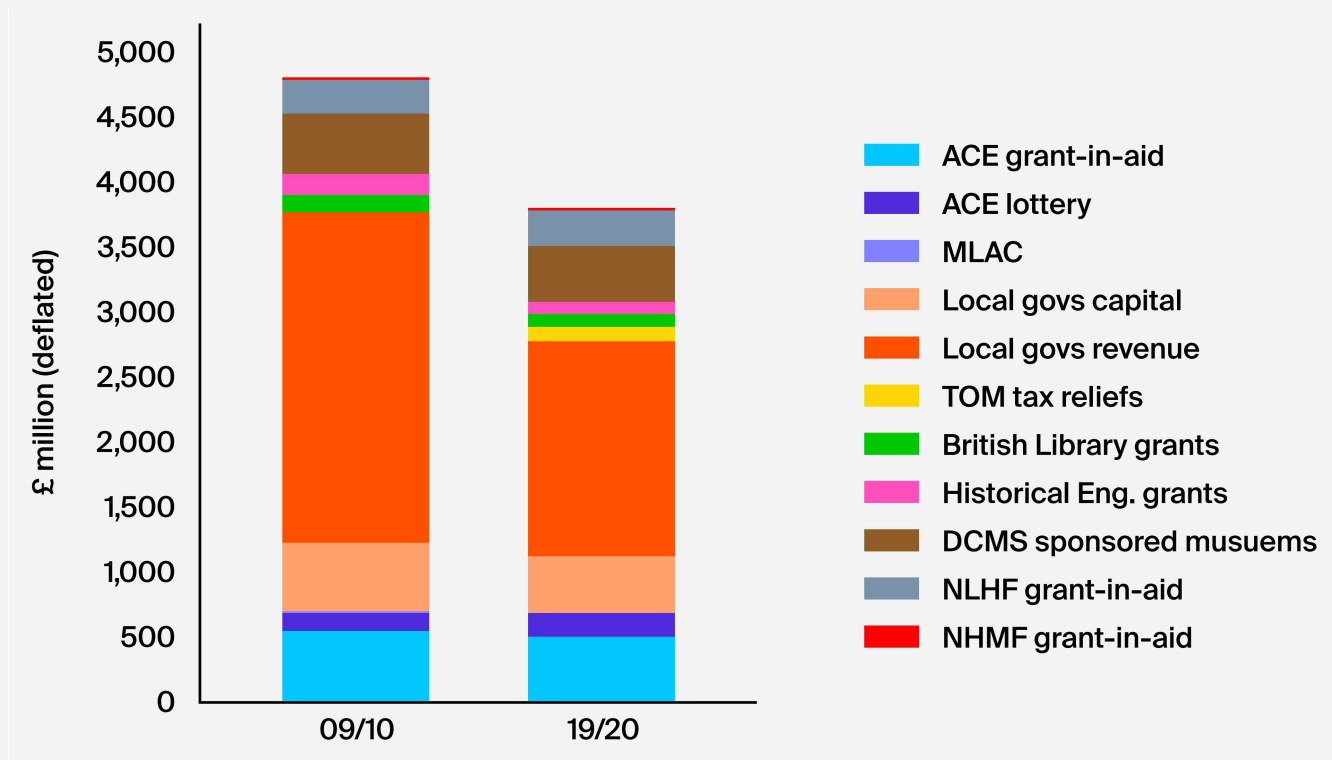


Fig 2. Data analysed by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre showing the change in available arts funding in England by type 2009-10 to 2019-20 (real terms, 2019-20 prices)⁹⁶



ACE is supporting 157 visual arts National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) and Investment Principles Support Organisations (IPSOs), receiving a combined total of £47,372,659. This compares to £64,676,459 allocated to 140 music organisations and £111,574,250 to 195 theatre organisations.



Top: National Saturday Club
Middle: First Site, Holiday Fun
2025. Photo by Aura Films
Bottom: BACKLIT, Nottingham

The impact of these cumulative cuts is stark.

Ikon Gallery, an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue located in Birmingham, had to close its Grade II Listed building to the public and ‘go dark’ for two days a week following core funding cuts. This, in turn, reduced its ability to provide public benefit through its work with schools and communities from across Birmingham and the wider West Midlands, during a time when Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery was closed for refurbishment. The gallery is still searching for solutions, and has been using historic reserves and investments to cover deficits – but this state of play is not sustainable in the long term.

Smaller, community-based organisations have also been pushed into precarious territory. Groups such as TOMA (The Other MA) in Southend once transformed empty retail units into lively cultural spaces, supported by modest local authority grants, their delivery of arts workshops (the non-accredited ‘MAs’ of its name), and volunteer efforts. Now, with funding and venues increasingly uncertain, they operate from grant to grant, their contributions to local regeneration efforts constrained by financial insecurity.⁹⁷

It is not only smaller organisations that are affected by a lack of funding. Whilst visitor numbers to major attractions have returned to pre-pandemic levels in many other countries, several of the UK’s most popular museums and galleries have yet to bounce back.⁹⁸ One contributing factor may be the financial strain these institutions are facing. The slower recovery of international tourism in the UK, especially when compared to places like France, is another important driver of the drop in attendance.⁹⁹ However, these challenges are arguably connected: a weakened cultural offer makes the UK less attractive as a cultural tourism destination.

For many galleries, one of the most pressing consequences of declining public funding has been the lack of capital investment. This has made it increasingly difficult to modernise facilities, expand operations, or keep pace with technological change. While recent initiatives – such as the UK City of Culture scheme, the Government’s Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund, and Community Ownership Fund – have introduced new sources of capital funding, these are often time-limited, highly competitive, and cannot replace the consistent, long-term capital, and revenue investment once provided by local authorities.¹⁰⁰ In this context, the announcement of the new £85 million Creative Industries Foundations Fund by the Culture Secretary in February 2025 was a particularly welcome development. The fund is expected to support some of the most urgent capital works needed to keep cultural venues across the country open, safe, and fit for purpose.¹⁰¹

Case Study

The Urgent Need for Financial Stability at Firstsite

Firstsite, a leading contemporary visual arts organisation based in Colchester, is under severe financial strain as a result of external economic shocks. The key challenges it faces include:

- An unplanned £650,000 increase in electricity costs, following a spike in its contract triggered by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.
- A collapse in commercial income due to the cost of living crisis.
- A significant drop in philanthropic support, with success rates for trusts and foundations falling from 90% to just 10%.
- Ineligibility for upcoming Museum Resilience Funding due to its status as a non-collecting institution.
- Being unable to apply for continued National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding from Arts Council England if existing funding partnerships are weakened.
- A risk of closure within three months if local authority funding is withdrawn.

“If action isn’t taken now, we risk losing this cultural institution, but the implications go beyond Firstsite alone: this situation underscores the urgent need for systemic reform, as well as available emergency funds, to secure both Firstsite’s future and the long-term resilience of the UK’s cultural landscape.”



Firstsite Gallery, Colchester

Case Study

Unlocking Growth Through Capital Investment in Lighting at Baltic

The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, the UK's largest non-collecting contemporary art space, has a 24-year-old lighting system that is inefficient, costly, and limits growth. Key issues include:

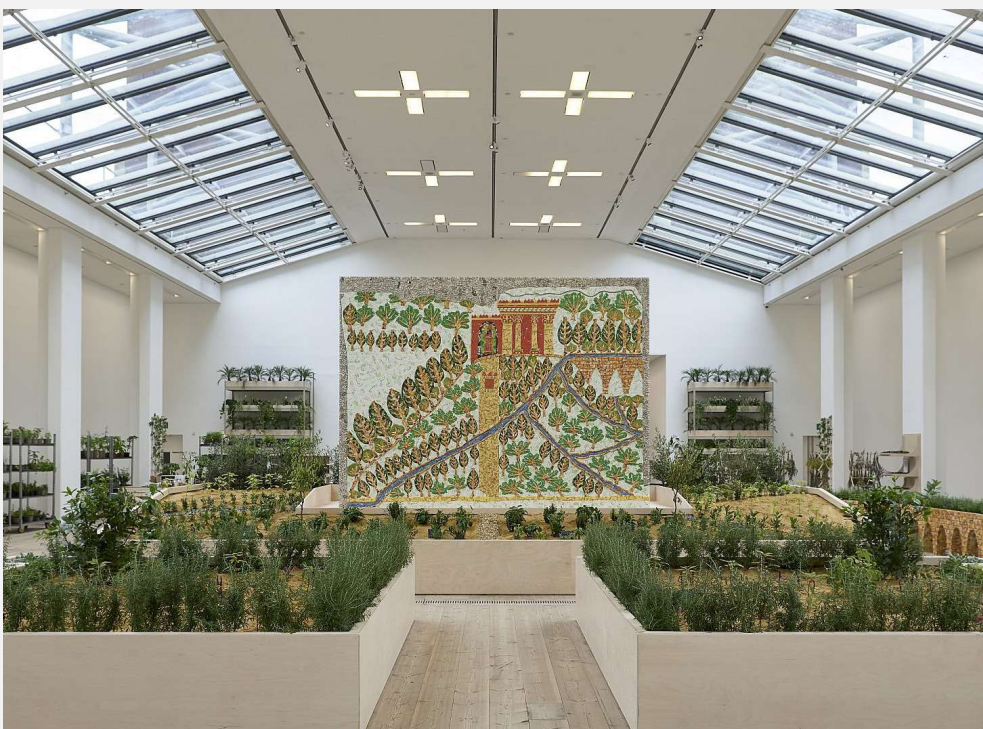
- Rising energy and maintenance costs.
- Poor exhibition lighting, reducing visitor and artist satisfaction.
- Excessive heat emissions, and a restricted ability to exhibit light sensitive artworks.
- Limited appeal for event hires, impacting revenue.

The organisation is trying to raise £900,000 to invest in an advanced LED lighting system to future-proof operations, enhance visitor experience, and increase revenue.

Upgrading to modern LED lighting would unlock multiple benefits:

- **Cost Savings**
Energy use reduced by up to 73%. Cost savings through energy efficiency are estimated at £57,000 each year, whilst maintenance savings are estimated at £4,000 each year.
- **Enhanced Visitor Experience**
- **Sustainability Gains**
10.3 metric tons of carbon emissions cut annually.
- **Revenue Growth**
Improved ability to meet the needs of customers in hire and event spaces, with increased occupancy of 15% which would increase profit by circa £30,000 per annum.

This intervention would be expected to return its initial investment within ten years.



Michael Rakowitz, *The Waiting Gardens of the North*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo by John McKenzie 2023

The pressures on individual artists

The mounting pressures across the visual arts ecosystem are having a profound impact on individual artists – many of whom interact directly with all parts of it. A survey conducted by CREATE at the University of Glasgow, commissioned by DACS, revealed that self-employed artists have seen a **47% decline in earnings from their creative work since 2010**.¹⁰² **Today, the median annual income brought in by self-employed visual artists from their work as artists is £12,500**. To make ends meet, many artists are forced to take on additional work, inside and outside of the creative industries.¹⁰³

The survey also highlighted a significant gender pay gap: women and artists of other genders earn around 40% less than men from their work as artists, with average earnings of just £7,500 compared to £12,500 for men.¹⁰⁴

These low earnings are partly the result of long-standing dynamics within the sector. As with other ‘superstar’ industries, a small number of high-profile artists generate a disproportionately large share of total income from artwork sales. This reinforces the economic rationale to support a wide base of practising artists, even if only a few achieve monumental commercial success. In this respect, the visual arts are not unlike other high-risk, high-reward sectors, where, for example, tech investors support a broad range of ventures in the hope that a few will yield significant returns.

However, this recent and dramatic decline in average income has been driven by the wider pressures outlined in this paper, and has been further intensified by technological change. In particular, the widespread availability of smartphones with high-quality cameras has expanded access to image-making whilst raising concerns that the expertise of established artists may be devalued.¹⁰⁵

More recently, the emergence of generative AI tools, such as DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, and Midjourney, has introduced a new set of policy challenges. These include the unauthorised use of artists’ work to train AI models, and the ability of these tools to generate lookalike content, allowing users to bypass paying or crediting the original creators. The evolving legal framework on AI and intellectual property will be critical in shaping the future business models available to visual artists.¹⁰⁶

Artists also face significant challenges in securing affordable and sustainable studio spaces, primarily due to low pay for the artists, rising rents, limited property availability, and insecure tenure. Rapid urban development and high competition for land have driven up costs, making it increasingly difficult for artists to afford suitable workspaces. CVAN estimates there are currently 520 studios in England. Given that, according to the Office for National Statistics, there were just under 43,000 professional artists in England in 2023, that means there is just one studio for every 82 professional artists.¹⁰⁷

Community Ownership has been a lifeline to many artists' studios, but this programme no longer exists. Jamaica Street Studios in Bristol has recently successfully raised £106,000 and secured a mortgage off the back of successful COF capital grant £500,400 and revenue grant £50,000. The studio holders will now own the building, securing their long-term future and investment.

Given this limited provision, many artists have been forced to downsize, relocate, or work in precarious short-term spaces, leading to instability that hampers artistic practice and wellbeing. Studio providers, particularly when non-profit organisations, struggle to balance operational costs while keeping rents affordable, often relying on public subsidies or temporary leases, which further exacerbate the sector's fragility. Without strategic interventions, such as policy support, financial incentives, and alternative ownership models like creative land trusts, the continued erosion of affordable artists' workspaces threatens the UK's broader visual arts ecosystem and its global cultural standing.

Case Study

How Grassroots Organisations Shaped the Career of Louise Giovanelli

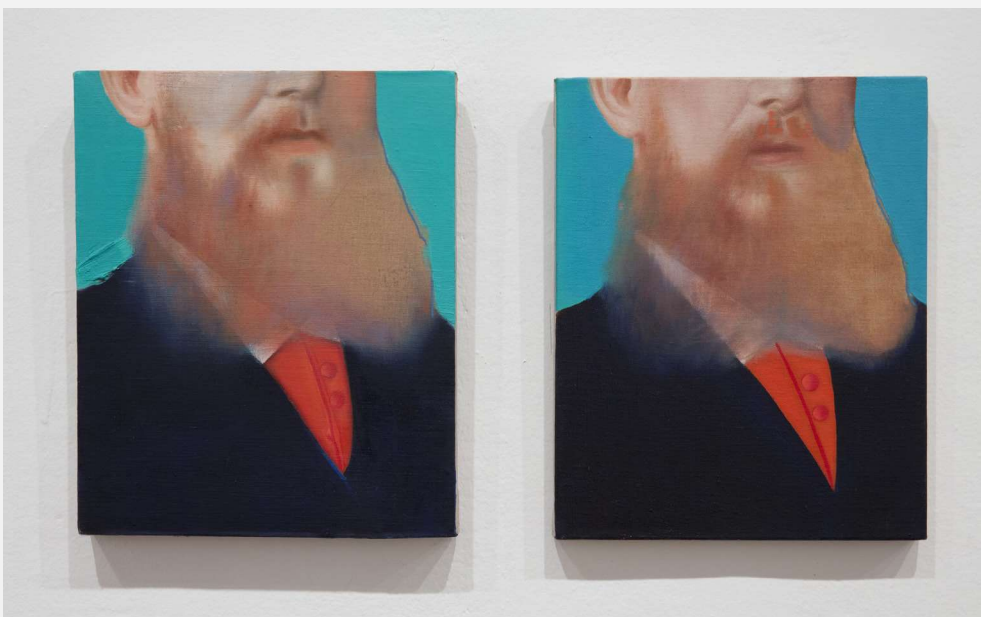
Louise Giovanelli's journey from graduate to internationally recognised artist offers a clear example of how grassroots organisations can play a foundational role in an artist's career.

Her work first caught the attention of curator Paulette Brien at Manchester Metropolitan University's Fine Art degree show in 2015. Recognising Giovanelli's distinctive use of colour and layered references to Old Masters, Brien invited her to exhibit with The International 3 – a non-profit and Arts Council England supported exhibition and project space in Salford, Greater Manchester. This early platform introduced her work to wider audiences and helped establish her within the North West's artistic community. At the same time, Giovanelli actively exhibited in the region's artist-led spaces, showing in spaces across Manchester, Salford and Liverpool.

These exhibitions built momentum, and in 2016, The International 3 staged her first solo show and began formally representing her. A steady run of solo and group exhibitions followed at artist-led and regional public galleries – each adding to her visibility. Acquisitions provided vital validation and income.

Crucially, The International 3 also supported the publication of her first monograph, ensuring that her work reached national and international audiences. By the time she was invited to exhibit at Manchester Art Gallery in 2019, Giovanelli's reputation had been firmly established through this network of committed local support.

From there, she joined artist-led Workplace Gallery, before going on to work with GRIMM Gallery and the internationally renowned White Cube. Today, Giovanelli is recognised as one of the most compelling artists of her generation, a success story that underscores the foundational role of grassroots and artist development organisations in an artist's journey.



Louise Giovanelli, *Beard III and Beard IV*, 2016. Courtesy Grundy Art Gallery Collection, Blackpool Council.

6

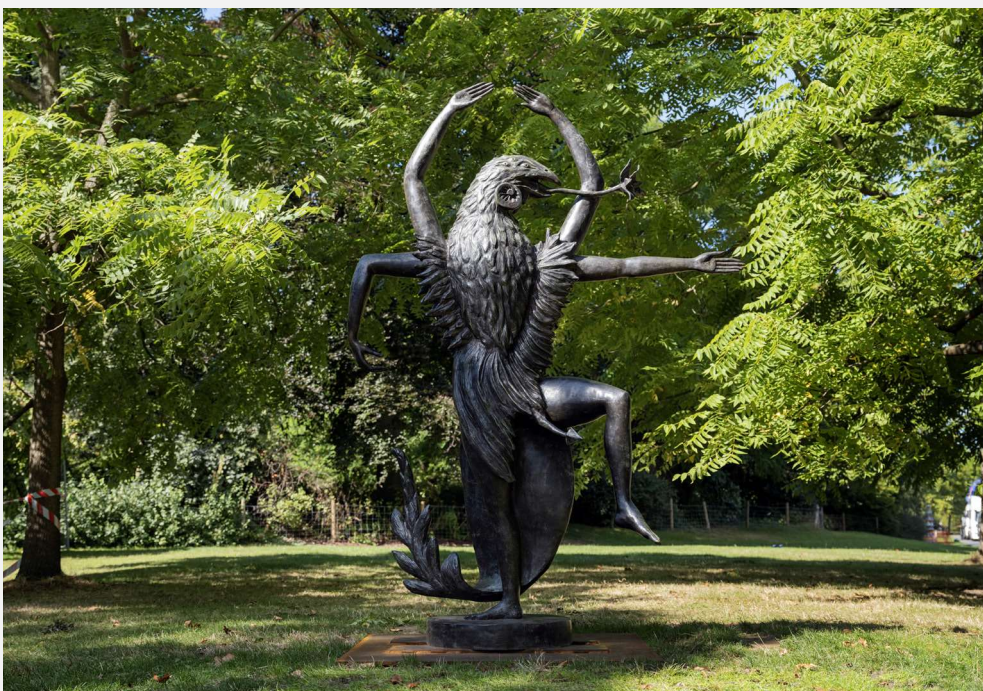


Recommendations for the Spending Review

Larry Achiampong, *PAN AFRICAN FLAGS FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS' ALLIANCE (WESTMINSTER)*, 2022.
Commissioned by Art on the Underground. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by GG Achard

This paper highlights the significant opportunities and challenges facing the visual arts sector. Our recommendations do not seek to address all of these issues. Instead, they are focussed on four measures that could be introduced in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. To fully realise the benefits of the UK's visual arts sector, broader structural policy interventions will be needed, for example education reform and the development of a cross-departmental Creative Health Strategy. We recommend that these are the subject of future work.

A key finding of our paper is that sustained support for non-profit organisations – through both local and national funding (including through Arts Council England) – will be essential to achieving the benefits we outline. The following recommendations should therefore be viewed as additions to this ongoing support, not as substitutes.



Leonora Carrington,
The Dancer (El Bailarín),
2011, rossogranada. Frieze
Sculpture 2024. Photo by
Linda Nylind, Courtesy of
Linda Nylind/ Frieze

Our recommendations:

1 Introduce a UK Cultural Investment Partnership Fund

To address the escalating crisis in the arts non-profit sector caused by local authority cuts, inflation, and systemic underinvestment, the UK Government should establish a **Cultural Investment Partnership Fund** – a permanent, centrally administered fund modelled on Canada's Canada Cultural Investment Fund (CCIF). Like the Canadian equivalent, this fund would combine three interconnected strands of support, each designed to build long-term resilience and innovation across the UK's arts non-profit ecosystem. As culture is a devolved responsibility, delivering this fund UK-wide would require a structured partnership with the national governments.

Targeted Support for At-Risk Arts Organisations

Many arts organisations have deep roots and strong community ties. Once lost, they are hard to replace as rebuilding networks, venues, expertise, and trust can take decades. In some circumstances, time-limited, emergency support can prevent such irreversible losses. This principle underpins Canada's CCIF Limited Support to Endangered Arts Organisations stream, which has helped vital institutions avoid collapse. In exceptional cases, funding supports the restructuring of organisations (which must be at least seven years old) that have strong community backing and a viable recovery plan.

Similarly, the UK should look to develop a programme which could provide support to organisations in sudden economic distress which can demonstrate strong local impact and public benefit, conditional on a credible recovery or transition plan to build long-term resilience. Ultimately, a stable funding environment is essential – whether through restored local authority support or a reliable national alternative. A positive Spending Review outcome, emergency measures, and the upcoming Baroness Hodge review of Arts Council England could form the basis for a coordinated response to the existential threats facing the UK's non-profit arts sector, reducing requirements on this programme of support in the long term.

Arts Business Model Innovation Fund

A mix of post-pandemic economic pressures, inflation, and underinvestment in technology has left the UK's non-profit arts sector in a fragile state. Many organisations are keen to innovate but unable to realise their full economic and social potential and lack the financial reserves to take risks.

Canada's Strategic Initiatives programme, as part of the CCIF, supports collaborative projects that strengthen business practices and diversify income in the non-profit arts and heritage sector. Projects must align with certain priorities including innovation, audience development, and strategic use of technology, benefit multiple organisations, and involve at least three partners.

We recommend the UK adopt a similar approach, aligned with the performing arts sector's proposal for a two-stage Business Model Innovation Fund.¹⁰⁸

Such a fund could support:

- **Seed Funding for Experimentation**

Encouraging bold, early-stage ideas to explore new income streams and more sustainable models.

- **Support for Social Value Initiatives**

Backing projects that aim to improve outcomes in health, education, or local economies. In this phase, organisations would build partnerships with bodies like the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS trusts, or philanthropic funders, and demonstrate value for money.

- **Follow-on Funding for Proven Models**

To access further investment, organisations would need to show clear evidence of financial sustainability or social impact. This would also help them attract commercial or social impact funding.

By enabling experimentation and rewarding success, this programme would help unlock new business models, boost income, and increase impact across the sector.

Leveraged Capital and Endowment Investment

To build long-term resilience in the UK's arts sector, the Government should create a single Matched Investment Fund that supports both capital improvements and the growth of endowments. Inspired by the success of the CCIF's Endowment Incentives programme (which, since its inception in 2001, has provided CA\$367 million (c. £200 million) in matching grants, leveraging private sector donations of CA\$516 million (c. £282 million)) – as well as by the recommendations recently made in the National Theatre's Scene Change report – this dual-purpose fund would address chronic underinvestment, reduce financial vulnerability, and unlock new sources of private and philanthropic support.¹⁰⁹ With a partial focus on environmental goals, this fund could also attract a new generation of philanthropists who have not previously supported the UK arts sector: CAF's UK Giving report shows that donations to conservation, environment, and heritage causes (£792 million) already far exceed those to the arts (£389 million).¹¹⁰

The fund would offer match funds to incentivise:

- Donations for capital investment including for development of affordable artist studios, decarbonisation, and retrofit – reducing overheads and supporting long-term sustainability.
- Endowment match funding to help organisations build permanent reserves and generate stable income, reducing reliance on short-term grants.

In addition, we recommend some resources be put towards feasibility support for planning and technical assistance, including decarbonisation roadmaps and fundraising strategies. Blended finance options (e.g. repayable finance for cost-saving green projects) could be explored to maximise long-term impact.

By combining capital investment with endowment building, this fund would strengthen the financial foundations of arts organisations, encourage long-term planning, and attract sustained private and social investment.

Insight

Joe Hill, Director CEO, Towner Eastbourne and Chair, Culture East Sussex

“ Visual arts organisations like Towner are inherently creative and entrepreneurial – not just in what we produce, but in how we work. Many of us are already maximising the commercial potential of our buildings, forging cross-sector partnerships, and delivering wide-reaching public value. But we’re doing this while operating at or beyond capacity. The opportunity to truly innovate – to reimagine business models, explore the commercial potential of our and other local assets, or develop new public-private approaches – requires time, space, and the ability to take calculated risks. That’s something we can’t do without targeted support.

As leaders, we’re ready to think differently and act boldly, but we need a framework that allows us to do so. A Cultural Investment Partnership Fund could offer exactly that: structured support to unlock experimentation, drive resilience, and help us realise new forms of cultural, social, and economic value. At Towner, we’ve seen what’s possible – hosting the Turner Prize brought an additional £16 million to the local economy and increased tourism by 25%. With targeted investment, that kind of return could become a model, not an exception. ”



Helen Cammock, *Garden*,
2023. Commissioned by
Eastbourne ALIVE and Artists'
Research Centre

2 Create a £5 million Grassroots Visual Arts Fund

Our research points to a chronic lack of availability for affordable and sustainable studio spaces for artists, primarily due to low pay for the artists, rising rents, limited property availability, and insecure tenure.

The Government should support this critical part of the ecosystem by establishing a new £5 million [Supporting Grassroots Visual Arts Fund](#) to provide direct financial assistance to small galleries and artist-led spaces. Modelled on the Supporting Grassroots Music Fund (which was given £5 million in 2023), this initiative would offer grants for studio space, exhibition costs, and talent development, ensuring that early-career artists have places to develop their talent, and bring that to a wider public.¹¹¹ As in the music fund, by grassroots, we mean the starting point where young or emerging artists get their first opportunities to show their work and where audiences have their first opportunity to engage with exciting new talent, and where the communities of fans who will help project this new talent into the limelight are built.



NewBridge Project,
Newcastle, print studio

Case Study

The NewBridge Project – A Fragile Future for Grassroots Arts Spaces

The NewBridge Project, based in Newcastle, is an artist-led organisation that supports artists, curators and communities and has an annual reach of 20,000 people. Through its provision of affordable studios, exhibition space, and a dynamic programme of commissions, events, and artist development, NewBridge has become a cornerstone of the city's creative ecology and a crucial hub for local communities. But like many grassroots arts spaces across the UK, its future is increasingly uncertain.

Since its founding in 2010, NewBridge has relocated four times, each move prompted not by a lack of growth or ambition, but by the precarity of short-term leases and lack of capital investment in the buildings it inhabits. Without long-term security or sustainable infrastructure support, the entire creative ecosystem built by NewBridge is at risk.

If the organisation were to lose its space again, 135 artists would immediately lose their studios, along with access to the learning, resources and community that underpin their practice. Local residents would also lose a shared building that has become a rare and essential site for creativity, gathering, and collaborative activity in the city.



NewBridge Project,
Newcastle. Photo by
Matt Denham

Case Study

Building Creative Infrastructure in Nottingham – BACKLIT¹¹²

BACKLIT is an internationally recognised, artist-led public gallery and studio space based in Nottingham. Since its founding in 2008, it has grown into a vital hub for the city's creative community, supporting over 120 practitioners – including sole traders and small businesses – while hosting national and international exhibitions and delivering a range of community and youth-focussed learning programmes.

Following Nottingham Council's declaration of bankruptcy in 2024, Alfred House (BACKLIT's home) was put up for sale, prompting a race against time for the gallery to secure the funds to purchase it.

Thanks to the support of their funders and communities, who collectively raised £880,000, BACKLIT has now announced the successful acquisition of Alfred House, securing the long-term future of its creative hub.

This milestone opens the door to further investment in environmental sustainability, accessibility, and digital innovation, while amplifying BACKLIT's already considerable social impact, currently valued at £4.49 million.



BACKLIT, Alfred House, Nottingham

3 Expand Access to Creative Education in and out of School

Access to the arts should be a fundamental part of a well-rounded education. After a period of cuts to provision, delivering this in England will require a long-term commitment rather than a short-term fix. However, as the Labour Party sets out its long-term vision for arts, culture, and the creative industries – including a review of curriculum and assessment, the establishment of a new National Centre for Arts and Music Education, and pledges to embed creative and vocational subjects within Progress 8 – additional investment is urgently needed to ensure that young people in schools with limited creative provision are not left behind in the short term.¹¹³

We recommend that the UK Government builds on its recent £3.2 million commitment to cultural education (including the Art & Design National Saturday Club) by investing £8.4 million annually from 2025–2029 to expand the National Saturday Club (NSC) network from 122 to 1,000 clubs across the country. This would provide free, high-quality extracurricular creative education to over 54,000+ young people aged 13–16, with a strong focus on underserved communities. As per the NSC's current funding model, Government investment would be match-funded by host organisations – including universities, colleges, and cultural institutions – with further support from trusts, foundations and businesses, including those already supporting the Clubs (e.g. Arts Council England, the British Fashion Council, the British Film Institute, Howdens Joinery, Garfield Weston Foundation, Clore Duffield Foundation).

With a proven record of engaging 76% of participants from widening participation backgrounds, (including those with disabilities, from low-income households and in care) this expansion would increase the Clubs' presence in priority areas from 35% to 80%, creating a scalable, low-cost bridge to sustained creative education.¹¹⁴ NSC's impact on well-being and skills development, enhanced through industry-backed masterclasses from organisations like Burberry, Warner Bros, and Adobe, makes it a useful tool in preparing the next generation for careers in the creative industries and beyond.

4 Restore Specialist Subject Funding for Creative Subjects in Higher Education

In line with recommendations made by CVAN, we recommend the Government reinstates high-cost funding for creative subjects in Higher Education. These programmes require additional investment due to the specialised industry-standard facilities, studios, equipment, and technical expertise necessary for delivery. The 2021 reduction in high-cost subject funding by the Office for Students (OfS) for creative arts, performing arts, and media studies has discouraged provision in these fields, which are vital to the UK's economic and cultural landscape.

Case Study

Nurturing Confidence, Creativity, and Career Readiness at The Winchester School of Art Saturday Club

The Winchester School of Art (WSA) Saturday Club at the University of Southampton has for the last seven years run a programme providing 20 young people per annum with hands-on creative experiences, fostering confidence, emotional resilience, and career readiness. Like many of the Saturday Clubs, it is funded through philanthropic donations, which are matched by the host organisation. Led by tutor Georgia de Buriatte, the Club offers a welcoming space for artistic exploration across disciplines like fine art, graphic design, and fashion.

Key partnerships not only help to fund the intervention but enhance the learning experience. A 2023–24 collaboration with OXFAM introduced members to sustainable fashion through upcycling and styling projects, developing their design and photography skills while encouraging ethical awareness. Industry-led masterclasses, including a 2024 session with Priestmangoode design agency, expose participants to real-world design practices, inspiring many to consider careers in design.

Beyond creative skills, the programme builds transferable abilities like problem-solving and teamwork. Members can also achieve a Bronze Arts Award qualification, further preparing them for future education and employment.

7

Strategic Levers for Sector Growth Beyond the Spending Review



While a Spending Review is primarily concerned with the allocation of public funds, it is important – particularly in this time of significant social, economic, and geopolitical upheaval – to explore complementary policies that could unlock new sources of revenue and industrial support. As public finances come under pressure, identifying alternative ways to sustain and grow the visual arts sector will be vital to ensuring its long-term resilience and contribution to national life.

1 Reduce Regulatory Burdens on the Art Market

We commend the UK Government's recent decision to extend the Temporary Admission (TA) scheme, allowing fine art and antiques to enter the country without incurring import duties for up to four years. This policy change is a significant step towards revitalising the British art market by enhancing its global competitiveness.

To further support the art sector, and while in favour of the Anti-Money Laundering (AML) regulations in principle, we recommend that the regulations be enforced through a more flexible, risk-based approach. Currently, the UK's process-driven framework imposes substantial compliance costs, particularly on small businesses. Adopting a model similar to those in the US and Hong Kong would maintain robust oversight while alleviating undue burdens on smaller enterprises.

2 Explore a Smart Fund to Sustain the Creative Economy

The shift to digital consumption of creative content has provided broad access to cultural works but has also been a driving force behind declining earnings for creators and performers. In the long term, it will be essential for the Government to consider which interventions can support the whole ecosystem, particularly if value is increasingly captured by one part, but requires the whole ecosystem to thrive for its creation.

The Government should consider the Smart Fund proposal from the creative sector as a sustainable funding solution. This initiative would introduce a small levy on the sale of devices that enable digital copying, raising £300 million annually to support fair pay for creators and performers, and increase investment in arts and culture across the ecosystem, without burdening taxpayers or consumers. Similar schemes have proven effective in 45 other countries, strengthening both the creative economy and the long-term sustainability of the arts sector. For example, the French scheme raises around €290 million a year for creators across disciplines, €75 million of which funds over 15,000 projects across France to support creative education and skills, access to culture, and developing new work.¹¹⁶

Case Study

The Impact of Brexit on Art Logistics at Hollybush Gardens

Since Brexit, Hollybush Gardens, a contemporary art gallery in London, has faced significant logistical challenges in transporting artworks between the UK and the EU. The gallery's registrar has observed a marked increase in transport times, with shipments that once took two to three days now often exceeding a week. Disruptions to shipping routes and a reduction in available services have led to increased costs, with dedicated vehicles sometimes being the only viable option to meet deadlines.

Customs clearance has become increasingly complex, requiring additional documentation and financial resources. The rising costs of shipping, compounded by temporary importation fees or a 5% import VAT on imported artworks, have placed further strain on the gallery's operations. Small art transport businesses, such as independent art handlers, now face particular difficulties navigating customs without established EU-based collaborators, adding another layer of logistical complication. The additional administration required has also meant it was necessary to hire new members of staff – a significant cost.

Beyond financial and operational burdens, these challenges have affected the gallery's relationships with international artists, collectors, and institutions. Delays in shipping impact exhibition schedules, loan agreements, and sales, reducing the gallery's ability to adapt to last-minute changes. The loss of flexible transport options has hindered the gallery's responsiveness, underscoring the ongoing impact of UK trade policy on the UK's art sector.

3 Empower Regions to Introduce a Tourist Levy

A 2019 Institute for Fiscal Studies report suggested that a £1 per night bed levy could raise £420 million annually across England, benefitting cities and tourist-heavy regions. London alone could generate £91 million with a flat-rate charge or £239 million with a 5% accommodation tax. Since Manchester introduced their charge in 2023, it has generated £2.8 million from a £1 per night hotel charge. However, primary legislation is required to give English local authorities the power to introduce such a tax (although in some UK local authority areas, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have been established that cover tourism-related businesses and can be used as a workaround). To enable cultural devolution, the Government should consider introducing this primary legislation to allow regions to decide for themselves whether to implement a tourism levy.

4 Increase Eligibility for the Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief

The Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief (MGETR) has been instrumental in supporting the sector. The sector warmly welcomed the announcement in 2024 that the relief would be made permanent. However, its current eligibility criteria exclude small commercial galleries and not-for-profit organisations operating under alternative business models. Expanding MGETR eligibility would unlock additional revenue for exhibition-related activities, supporting the sustainability of the visual arts sector. Government could look to:

- Expand eligibility to include selling exhibitions where profits are reinvested into the organisation or the wider arts ecosystem.
- Include education, learning, and outreach activities, which enhance audience engagement and long-term growth.
- Recognise digital exhibitions by making development costs eligible, reflecting the sector's hybrid presentation models.
- Support live art and performance within gallery settings, aligning with existing tax relief for interdisciplinary creative work.

Conclusion

The visual arts are a vital part of the UK's cultural, social, and economic fabric. As this paper has shown, they contribute to national prosperity, support individual and community wellbeing, enhance education, and strengthen Britain's global influence. Yet, the ecosystem that underpins these contributions is under increasing strain. With relatively modest but well-targeted interventions, the Government has the opportunity to unlock the sector's full potential – revitalising local economies, improving public services, and ensuring that creativity remains a cornerstone of national life. We hope this paper serves as a starting point for a necessary conversation about how the Government can work with the sector to realise that potential.

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CVAN Contemporary Visual Arts Network

CVAN connects the visual arts networks across England to influence policy and champion the sector, working collectively to ensure a strong and sustainable future. Through advocacy, research, and learning, CVAN supports artists and organisations to thrive.

The logo for CVAN (Contemporary Visual Arts Network) features the word "cvan" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font.

John Hansard Gallery

A contemporary art gallery in Southampton, part of the University of Southampton. It presents bold exhibitions and public programmes with a focus on community and education.

The logo for John Hansard Gallery features the name "John Hansard Gallery" in a stacked, serif font.

University of Southampton

A leading UK university is known for research, innovation, and academic excellence. It fosters global collaboration and inclusive learning.

The logo for the University of Southampton features a crest with a book and a torch, followed by the text "University of Southampton" in a serif font.

Erskine Analysis

A think tank founded by Eliza Easton in 2023, it focuses on soft power and the creative economy. It produces policy-shaping research with partners like DCMS and the National Theatre.

The logo for Erskine Analysis features the name "Erskine Analysis" in a serif font, with "Erskine" on the top line and "Analysis" on the bottom line.

DACS (Design and Artists Copyright Society)

DACS protects, manages and campaigns for the rights of artists, photographers and creators. It distributed over £16 million in royalties in 2024.

The logo for DACS (Design and Artists Copyright Society) features the word "DACCS" in a bold, uppercase, sans-serif font.

a-n The Artists Information Company

The UK's largest membership organisation for visual artists. It is the artists' advocate, campaigning on crucial issues and ensuring artists' voices heard.

The logo for a-n (The Artists Information Company) features the letters "a·n" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font, with a dot between the letters.


APPG for Visual Arts and Artists

This cross-party group supports the UK's visual arts and addresses issues like pay and precarity. It champions the role of artists in culture and the economy.

The logo for the APPG for Visual Arts and Artists features a crest with a building, followed by the text "Visual Arts and Artists" and "appg" in a sans-serif font.

Plus Tate

Plus Tate is a network of 45 visual arts organisations across the UK that exchange ideas, knowledge, skills and resources.

The logo for Plus Tate features the text "PLUS TATE" in a bold, uppercase, sans-serif font.

Framing the Future: The Political Case for Strengthening the Visual Arts Ecosystem was commissioned by CVAN England Contemporary Visual Arts Network and John Hansard Gallery, which is part of the University of Southampton, in collaboration with a-n The Artists Information Company, DACS (Design and Artists Copyright Society), and Plus Tate.

This sector-wide report, developed and written by Eliza Easton, Director of Erskine Analysis, presents the economic, cultural, and social case for strategic investment in the visual arts.

Supported by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Visual Arts and Artists.

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